

**Hurricane Harvey Response 2017
Community Liaison (CL) Report**

TO: Janetta Coates and Valmichael Leos

FROM: David Bryan/Jeremy Ford/Devin Pollock/Jim Stevens

SUBJECT: Hurricane Harvey Response 2017

COUNTY: Jasper and Newton Counties

DATE: 9/13/17

SUMMARY:

The team travelled to Newton, Texas to meet with Newton County Extension Agent Dr. Aaron Sumrall and Newton County Precinct 3 Commissioner Gary Fomby. We were given a tour of the extensive damage in Newton County to homes, roads and infrastructure. We were also taken to the location of two houses that have slid into a creek and tributary of the Sabine River. The houses are partially in the water and hang precariously on the bank. Current concerns are that the houses will slip into the water and either block the creek or send debris down the creek to the river just a quarter of a mile away. (Jeromy Ford is contact for the exact location of the houses).

Commissioner Fomby and Dr. Sumrall showed us several areas where the county and precinct roads have been washed out by the storm. The Commissioner explained that their first priority was to open county roads so that residents could come in to assess the damage on their properties and to their homes. He said the county/precinct have been working on temporary fixes so that buses can get through on the bus routes to pick up students for school. He hopes that something can be done to assist with this effort. They currently only have a three-man crew that can work on these projects, an overwhelming task with insufficient resources.

Dr. Sumrall has been given master copies of the approved fact sheets and is in the process of getting them to different organizations and agencies throughout Newton County.

We also visited Deweyville (in southern Newton County) where the water has just today receded back into the Sabine River. Large piles of debris are everywhere in the community. We were able to meet volunteers from the Salvation Army meal truck.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Is there public funding/agency assistance available for communities to work on roads, bridges

and culverts to make it safe for residents to get to work and for buses to transport children to schools? THIS IS THE CRITICAL ISSUE. The community was just beginning to repair the damage from floods in May 2016 and now face the destruction from this August 2017 storm.

Why was Jackson/Newton counties excluded from the aerial spraying for mosquitos? All the team members can tell you the extraordinary amount of mosquitos that are everywhere. Spraying will be absolutely critical in the next few days in an area where some residents do not have power.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

HHW and debris collection is a serious issue but there doesn't seem to be a clear answer yet in either county. Our visit in Deweyville and other hard-hit southern areas of the counties during our time Wednesday showed a tremendous need for more federal presence and debris collection. The community is just now being allowed back at their homes to begin recovery from the storm.

The two counties are decidedly rural and some of the methods used in densely populated urban areas will be much more difficult in the rural counties.

No Disaster Recovery Centers have been opened up in the rural areas. Jasper County hosted a center in Jasper, Texas in May 1996 after flooding in the area and the Jasper-Newton Emergency Operations Coordinator, Billy Ted Smith, has told us they would like to do so again. Individual assistance may be available online but this seems to be impractical for a widely-spread rural population who may not have internet access.

They have been very upfront, if not blunt, that they are envious of the more populated areas who are receiving assistance from a whole host of federal, state and volunteer agencies. They just would like to be placed on the roadmap for assistance.

As always, thanks for listening and your possible attention to these issues.

David, Jim, Jeremy and Devin